

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /026 W

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R 241403Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 511

INFO AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 7190

EXDIS

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PINT, UR

SUBJ: BREZHNEV'S FUTURE: II: THE HONORIFIC OPTION

1. SUMMARY. POSSIBLE CEREMONIAL RETIREMENT TO A NEW, HIGHER LEVEL POST -- AN OPTION WHICH IS OFTEN MENTIONED BY LOCAL JOURNALISTS -- WOULD PROBABLY HOLD FEW CHARMS FOR BREZHNEV OR THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP AS A WHOLE. THE ONLY COMMUNIST PRECEDENT FOR THIS WE CAN THINK OF, WALTHER ULBRICHT'S, WOULD SEEM TO BE INAPPROPRIATE SINCE HE WAS SHUFFLED OUT OF THE WAY OF SOVIET DESIGNS. THE TITO SOLUTION WOULD ALSO CREATE PROBLEMS FOR SOVIET IDEOLOGISTS WHO WOULD BE MOST RELUCTANT TO ADMIT VALUE TO ANY YUGOSLAV MARXIST INNOVATION. RUMORS THAT THE SOVIETS MIGHT CREATE A "STATE COUNCIL," WHICH APPEARED A FEW YEARS AGO, HAVE NOT SURFACED DURING THE CURRENT SPECULATION ABOUT BREZHNEV'S ROLE AFTER THE NEXT PARTY CONGRESS. IF IT BECOMES THEIR INTENTION, WE BELIEVE THAT THE SOVIETS WOULD GIVE AMPLE PRIOR NOTIFICATION TO THEIR MEDIA OF PLANS TO ESTABLISH A SENIOR RETIREMENT POST FOR BREZHNEV. BUT WE SEE LITTLE REASON FOR THEM TO DO SO NOW. ALTHOUGH EVIDENTLY STILL A PART-TIME LEADER, BREZHNEV IS APPARENTLY CAPABLE OF PROVIDING THE SORT OF LEADERSHIP THEY HAVE ENJOYED OVER THE PAST SIX MONTHS -- A TIME WHEN SOVIET FORTUNES HAVE WAXED FAT. THE ONLY MAJOR INCREASING DEMAND ON THE

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HORIZON FOR HIM IS PREPARATIONS FOR THE 25TH PARTY

CONGRESS, EXPECIALLY THE PLACEMENT OF VITAL POLITICAL CADRES IN KEY LOCAL POSTS. END SUMMARY.

2. RUMORS OF THE CREATION OF A "STATE COUNCIL" ON TOP OF THE EXISTING SOVIET STRUCTURE APPEARED NOT TOO MANY YEARS AGO IN MOSCOW, AND IT WAS THEN WIDELY THOUGHT THAT PERHPAS BREZHNEV WOULD BE THE LOGICAL CHOICE TO FILL THIS SPOT. THE PURPOSE OF THE STATE COUNCIL WAS NOT SPELLED OUT, BUT IT APPEARED TO BE A MANEUVER TO GATHER EVEN MORE POWER INTO BREZHNEV'S HANDS. IN THIS RESPECT IT WAS THE OPPOSITE OF THE EAST GERMAN CONTRIVANCE WHICH PROVED TO BE NOTHING MORE THAN A PARKING SPOT FOR WALTHER ULBRICHT WHO WAS MAKING TOO MUCH TROUBLE FOR THE SOVIETS IN THEIR GERMAN POLICY. THE SOVIET "STATE COUNCIL" NEVER PANNED OUT, AND, AS BECAME ABUNDANTLY CLEAR, BREZHNEV HAS DONE VERY WELL AT MAXIMIZING HIS POWER AND INFLUENCE WITHIN THE EXISTING SOVIET STRUCTURE. PERHAPS FOR THIS REASON, NOTHING HAS BEEN HEARD ABOUT THE POSSIBLE CREATION OF ANOTHER LEVEL IN THE SOVIET HIERARCHY IN THE CURRENT ROUND OF SPECULATION ABOUT BREZHNEV'S POLITICAL STATUS AFTER THE NEXT PARTY CONGRESS.

3. IF THE SOVIETS SHOLD DECIDE TO BUILD SUCH A CEREMONIAL PENTHOUSE, WE BELIEVE THAT THEY WOULD FIRST HAVE TO PREPARE THEIR VAST BUREAUCRACY FOR THE EVENT BY ELABORATING A THEORETICAL JUSTIFICATION FROM THE MARXIST-LENINIST SCRIPTURES. THIS WOULD BE NECESSARY BOTH BECAUSE OF THEIR PSEUDO-LEGALISTIC APPROACH TO INNOVATIONS AND TO DAMPEN INEVITABLE FEARS OF CHANGE. FOR THESE REASONS, WE BELIEVE THAT THEORETICAL AND LEGALISTIC EXEGESIS IN THE SOVIET MEDIA WOULD PRECEDE ANY SUCH ACTION AND THUS WOULD GIVE INTERESTED ANALYSTS AMPLE PRIOR NOTIFICATION. IN ADDITION, THE USUAL "NOVOSTI" RUMOR MILL WOULD ALSO SEIZE ON THE EVENT AND TRY TO PREEMPT WESTERN EVALUATIONS.

4. SHOULD THE SOVIETS BE FACED WITH THE NEED TO DISPOSE OF BREZHNEV AS THE TOP LEADER ON THE GROUNDS
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OF PHYSICAL OR MENTAL INCAPACITY, WE DOUBT VERY MUCH THAT THEY WOULD FIND IT NECESSARY TO PLACE HIM IN A CEREMONIAL POST. HE WOULD PROBABLY SIMPLY GO INTO SEMI-OBSCURITY UNTIL HIS PHYSICAL DEMISE; AT THAT TIME, THE RULING GROUP WOULD DECIDE ON THE MODALITIES OF TREATMENT -- APOTHEOSIS OR DAMNATION, DEPENDING ON THE POLITICAL NEEDS OF THE MOMENT.

5. WE THEREFORE BELIEVE THE ARGUMENTS AGAINST VOLUNTARY RELINQUISHMENT OF POWER BY BREZHNEV (REFTEL) CURRENTLY WEIGH AGAINST HIS BEING KICKED UPSTAIRS TO A CEREMONIAL RETIREMENT POST. BREZHNEV SEEMS PHYSICALLY ABLE TO CONTINUE FOR THE NEAR TERM THE STYLE OF LEADERSHIP WHICH HE HAS BEEN PROVIDING FOR THE LAST YEAR. THIS LEADERSHIP APPEARS TO BE SATISFACTORY FOR THE SOVIETS AT THIS HISTORICALLY FAVORABLE TIME FOR THEM. OF COURSE, CONTINUATION OF THE CURRENT RELAXED STYLE IN BREZHNEV'S LEADERSHIP WOULD ONLY BE POSSIBLE IF NO MAJOR DOMESTIC SHAKEUPS OCCUR. SHOULD THE REQUIREMENTS INCREASE DRASTICALLY, BREZHNEV'S HEALTH MAY INDEED BECOME INADEQUATE TO THE DEMANDS OF HIS OFFICE, AND A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP COULD WELL ENSUE.

6. THE MAJOR REQUIREMENT FOR THE TOP POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AT THIS MOMENT IS THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE 25TH PARTY CONGRESS. SHIFTS IN POLITICAL CADRES IN THE OBLAST AND REPUBLIC PARTY ORGANIZATIONS ARE OF GREAT SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE FORTUNES OF POLITICAL CHIEFTAINS AND ARE REFLECTED IN THE COMPOSITION OF THE CPSU CENTRAL COMMITTEE. BREZHNEV HIMSELF AND OTHER POLITBURO MEMBERS WILL HAVE A VOICE IN CADRE PLACEMENTS AND, AS EXPERIENCED PROFESSIONAL APPARATCHIKS, THEY CAN BE EXPECTED TO GIVE INCREASING ATTENTION TO THESE VITAL MATTERS AS LOCAL PARTY ELECTIONS DRAW NEAR. FOR THE MOST PART, CADRE DECISIONS CAN BE MADE IN MOSCOW BUT IT IS CUSTOMARY FOR THE PATRON TO ATTEND SOME OF THE MAJOR POLITICAL INSTALLATIONS. THESE ACTIVITIES APPEAR TO BE WELL WITHIN BREZHNEV'S PHYSICAL CAPACITY. AS A LIFELONG POLITICIAN, THEY MAY IN FACT BE AS MUCH OF A TONIC AS A DRAIN UPON HIM.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL PARTIES, PARTY LEADERS, PERSONNEL ASSIGNMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 24 MAY 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975MOSCOW07190
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750183-0987
From: MOSCOW
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750519/aaaaarbq.tel
Line Count: 155
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18 JUN 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <18 JUN 2003 by izenbei0>; APPROVED <19 JUN 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BREZHNEV'S FUTURE: II: THE HONORIFIC OPTION
TAGS: PINT, UR, (BREZHNEV, LEONID)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006